

**Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments**  
**Appropriations Hearing**  
**HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**  
**Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**William C. Kohlhepp**  
**Volunteer**  
**Columbus House**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, I am writing to provide written testimony in support of HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023. I am specifically writing to discuss the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is William Kohlhepp and I am a resident of Durham, Connecticut. I recently retired from my position as Dean of the School of Health Sciences at Quinnipiac University. I am also a Connecticut licensed physician assistant.

I am a member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. We, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for permanent housing for all of Connecticut's residents was made even more important.

**I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):**

- I support the preservation of DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line at \$23.404 million;
- I support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations funded by DMHAS;
- I support an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (*including \$5.26 million increase in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line, and \$8.08 million at DOH*) to [provide homeless and housing service organizations funding](#) for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology;
- I support the Governor's proposed use of \$2.8 million of ARPA (\$1.1m FY23; \$1.1m FY24; \$562,000 FY25) for [wrap-around services](#) for 150 units of supportive housing. Supportive services are an **ongoing need and require a permanent investment**, and as such we are asking Appropriations to **support an increase** in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line of \$2.25 million in FY23 to [expand supportive services](#) to 300 scattered site and development units for highly vulnerable individuals and families with persistent obstacles to maintaining housing stability

**Homelessness is solvable but it will take a variety of focused efforts to do so.** Connecticut can make homelessness a rare, brief and one-time experience by investing in what works: housing, supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents. I am a longtime volunteer with Columbus House, working through my church in North Haven to host 12 homeless men for a week each winter as part of a Columbus House initiative – Abraham’s Tent. Initially, I was introduced to need for a focus on the issues of homelessness when my wife served on the Board of Columbus House. Through my conversations with individuals supported by Columbus House, I have learned just how easily one can become homeless. Housing stability should be a focus for all of us.

As a health professions educator, I am very concerned with the pressures on our frontline workers in general. But, as I listen to those who staff the shelters for the homeless, I am even more concerned. Clearly, this epidemic has challenged the healthcare system and has pushed those combatting homelessness to the brink. It has also uncovered significant needs in our services for those struggling with mental health challenges. We must provide sufficient wages to allow those on the frontlines to be more secure in their own abilities to pay for housing.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut’s future beyond the pandemic– it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut’s residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,  
**William C. Kohlhepp, DHSc, PA-C**  
**Columbus House Volunteer**  
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